

Singularity in a Can

After you plug it into a wall socket, you press the button on the side, wait for the red light to turn blue, remove the lid, and, voila, there's a mini black hole churning away inside it like a whirlpool in a midnight ocean. Don't ask me how it works. I'm just a cabinet maker. What little brains I have are stuck in my 22-year-old hands.

You can chuck any kind of rubbish into the hole, provided it will fit. The hole will gobble it up in seconds. And you can chuck any quantity of rubbish. A ton, two tons, more. You'd have to spend a month of Sundays standing there, feeding it all in, though. But once the rubbish is gone, it's gone forever. No need to bag it, bin it, or take it to a rubbish tip. It just vanishes, like magic. I took a long leak into my black hole once just to see what happened. Urine oblivion happened.

The nagging problem of what to do with planet-choking amounts of rubbish has at last been solved, by a singularity in a can.

But what really happens to all that rubbish?

According to physicists, everything sacrificed to the swirling dark god is pulled and stretched until it becomes a string of atoms and essentially ceases to exist. But Dave, a mate, disagrees. He reckons whatever enters a black hole

must come out the other side. To test his theory, he built a probe that he's about to drop into the singularity in a can on my kitchen bench in 3-2-1!

Oh hell. The probe's camera feed died. Instantly.

"So much for that idea, Petey," Dave said with a resigned sigh.

Suddenly an explosion of white light replaced the blizzard of static on Dave's laptop screen, and the probe's readout flicked on, pumping out info at a disorienting rate. "Yes!" Dave cried.

He laughed in triumph. I laughed too. This was going to be historic.

The feed revealed flashes of dark ahead of all the glaring white, which dissipated like thinning cloud as the probe debouched in a parallel universe. Stars shone in a sea of black. White stars, red stars, green stars, blue stars, yellow stars.

We performed a stammering duet of shock and wonder.

Something buffeted the probe. Dave swung the probe hard left and switched the camera to reverse angle. "White holes," he said, awestruck.

They were everywhere, as far as the camera could see, spewing planet Earth's rubbish into this nascent universe. An old mattress whizzed past. Then some empty paint cans.

Then scores and scores of . . . what were those things?

AbDominators!

The tip of the nearest white hole's tail broke free of the black hole it was attached to and chased after the probe. The tips of other white holes did likewise. "What the . . . ?" Dave said in disbelief.

The camera feed winked out as the first tail seized the probe.

Dave leaned back in the kitchen stool he was perched on, trying to process everything.

"What happened back there?" I said.

"It's like those white holes have sentience," he murmured. "How is that even possible?"

"You're asking *me*?"

BANG.

Something, a large rock maybe, hit the roof, followed by a downpour of supposed rocks. Then a metal bucket filled with hardened cement crashed through the ceiling and took out my glass-topped breakfast table. A glass shard pierced my flesh. *Ow! Me bum!*

We fled the house. A second later, a rusty shipping container totaled the joint. Only the front door and jamb were left standing.

Houses, whole blocks, whole suburbs it looked like, were

ablaze and being leveled by plummeting rubbish, millions and millions of tons of it, flung out of whirling, roaring white holes in the sky like stones from a slingshot. Much of it was too big for domestic singularities in a can. Stuff like the shipping container, an oil tanker, and—*oh shit!*—drums of nuclear waste must have been dumped in the super-sized models used by industry.

Screams came from across the road. A hail of broken bricks was battering to death a young Chinese family en route to a Mazda SUV in their driveway. They didn't scream for long.

In the distance, a flaming passenger jet skewered with steel girders slammed into a brand new Costco about one-K away, exploding in a mushroom-shaped fireball. A business-class seat flattened my lavender plant.

Dave bolted. Yelling hysterically, he got roughly 100 meters up the road before a doorless commercial fridge turned him into a tomato squashed underfoot.

I scanned for a place to keep me breathing. There was a semi-trailer parked down the road, several houses away. I could hide under it until the deadly sky-fall abated. If it abated.

As I made for the semi, a stream of warm, pungent liquid splattered on my head. Why did I have to go and piss in that

black hole?

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